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ABSTRACT

Based on a case study of training programs in Ohio community action agencies which serve economically disadvantaged youth from ages 14 to 21, this document contains a collection of innovative ideas and programs. The programs presented are divided into three main sections: in-school programs, out-of-school programs, and other ideas. Most of the programs described are currently in operation in a community action agency but are not widespread across the state. Each program description includes a program title, suggested funding sources, a summary of the general nature of the program, and a special notes/comments section. Nine program ideas are described in the in-school and out-of-school program sections. The third section contains ten innovative suggestions for improving the operation of individual programs as well as overall agency functioning. (BM)

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A SAMPLER OF INNOVATIVE PROGRAM IDEAS FOR OHIO'S COMMUNITY ACTION AGENCIES

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Economic and Community Development

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FOREWORD

We are pleased to present this "Sampler" to the Ohio Department of Economic and Community Development (DECD). It is a result of a cooperative working relationship between The Center for Vocational Education (CVE) and the DECD. The "Sampler" contains many interesting ideas for developing innovative youth training programs in a community action agency setting. A companion report to this one--Youth Training Programs in Ohio's Community Action Agencies: A Case Study--has also been prepared and is available from the DECD.

The Center is indebted to Dr. Ray Lawton of the DECD for his support and enthusiasm for this endeavor. Appreciation is extended to Dr. James W. Altschuld (CVE) and Ms. Terese Terry (DECD) who prepared this paper and to Ms. Janice Lave who reviewed the draft. Appreciation is also extended to the six participating community action agencies in Ohio and their staffs for suggesting some of the ideas summarized in this study.

Finally, a special note of thanks is extended to Ms. Marlene Linton who typed the manuscript and Dr. Jerry Walker, Associate Director for Evaluation, whose division was responsible for conducting this activity.

Robert E. Taylor

Robert E. Taylor
Director

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I. Introduction

A "sampler" is much like a patchwork quilt of interwoven colors and hues. The beholder can see a totality of pattern or is free to focus on corners or smaller themes that are only of special importance to himself or herself. It is from the latter perspective that this document should be viewed. This report is a collection of ideas and programs--some new but mostly variations on already existing ones*--that have merit for further consideration by community action agencies both in Ohio and elsewhere. To go one step further, the viewer is encouraged to develop his/her own quilt of imaginative thoughts. Indeed if that does occur, the sampler will have accomplished its objective, helping to initiate thinking toward the improvement of youth oriented training programs under the jurisdiction of community action agencies.

The ideas and programs in the sampler are partially an outgrowth of a case study of youth oriented training programs in Ohio Community Action Agencies.** (Altschuld and Terry, 1977) For the purpose of

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* Henry Barnard, the noted anthropologist once suggested that in actuality, there are no new ideas but only old ideas in new or different forms.

** Altschuld, J. W. and Terry, T. A Study of Youth Training Programs in Ohio's Community Action Agencies, 1977. The reader is also referred to this report for a series of recommendations regarding program improvement.

that study, the program at six representative community action agencies in Ohio were closely examined. Detailed and lengthy field visits to the agencies were conducted and the following types of individuals were interviewed:

- Agency administrators
- Program directors
- Counselors
- Work experience supervisors
- Program participants

These individuals are generally involved with work experience and training programs funded by the Comprehensive Employment Training Act (CETA), the Community Services Administration (CSA) and so forth. These programs are targeted at the chronically unemployed in inner cities, and depressed rural or semi-urban areas. The focus of the study was on those parts of programs that affect in and out-of-school youth ranging from 14-21 years of age.

All aspects of youth oriented training were examined. This examination included not only the training or work experience itself, but also agency context, counseling services available, techniques for identifying and informing potential participants and sponsoring work sites, and program evaluation. The study tried to ascertain the state of the art as well as strengths and weaknesses of programs. Suggestions for program improvement and innovation which were solicited from all interviewed individuals constitute a major source of input into this sampler. The other source of input is the (hopefully) selective judgments and perspectives of the two authors. They have tried to summarize the thinking of the field and their own perceptions into a set of what they feel will be meaningful innovations for local agency use.

Before turning to the organization of the sampler, an additional concern regarding the concept of innovation must be expressed. Most of the innovations to be discussed are not really innovative or new. Many so called new programs are really modifications of old ideas that possibly are beginning to just now re-emerge. What is interesting about these ideas is that they are occurring on only an isolated and infrequent basis and yet they are generalizable and seem to warrent careful re-examination. (In effect, their infrequent use makes them innovative.) It is in this spirit of re-examination that they are included in this sampler.

II. Organization

The sampler is divided into three main sections. They are in-school programs, out-of-school programs; and other ideas. In-school programs as implied by the name deal with training programs only available to students still in school. Out-of-school programs are mostly for those individuals who have dropped out of school or who have graduated but are unable to find employment. Many of these individuals lack employability skills such as working under supervision, following directions, understanding the work ethic and so forth. The last section--other ideas--focuses more on techniques for improving program operation.

The description of individual programs and ideas in the next two sections consists of the following parts:

Title/Descriptor: Self explanatory

Funding Source: Self explanatory

General Nature: A brief paragraph or two which outlines the general features of the program or idea, the target population, etc.

Special Notes/Comments: A brief paragraph highlighting interesting aspects of the program/idea, specialized problems/solutions and so forth.

The programs and ideas contained in the sampler are not presented in exhaustive detail inasmuch as they would probably vary when implemented from location to location. Thus, they are presented more in "profile" than full face.

If a community action agency decides to adapt/adopt a program idea, numerous factors will have to be taken into account. First, funding for the program must be secured. This can be accomplished in a variety of ways such as refocussing existing, funded programs; seeking new sources of funds; and combining funds from several programs already in operation. For purposes of this discussion refocussing programs and combining funds from several programs are being stressed especially in light of the current tight money situation. Options for different uses of current financial sources need to be explored. Secondly, the agency must consider whom the program will be targeted for because spreading a program too thin may inhibit its impact. To be most effective, a program should be aimed toward a specific purpose and group. Lastly, the unique community in which each agency exists must be carefully examined before initiating a new program. Since communities do vary, this careful examination enables the program to be responsive to local needs.

In-School Programs

Title/Descriptor: Police Cadets

Funding Soucce: CETA In-school Funds (and some Law Enforcement Administration Act funds)

General Nature of the Program: Police agencies in one small community are working quite closely with the CETA in-school program. A deputy in the local sheriff's office is the program coordinator and works with each student. Students are involved in training related to a variety of law enforcement activities such as radio dispatching, traffic and lunchroom control. One to two formal training classes are held each month in addition to the general work experiences provided for the student. There are as many as 28 paid working students involved in this program.

Special Notes/Comments: Many of the students in the program have had direct court involvement and are considered to be those students with a high probability of "winding up in trouble." The students who participate in the program are either recruited from the schools or are identified by court referrals and local law enforcement officials. The coordinator of the program maintains a close working relationship with each student. When possible, the Police Cadets program has even taken the participating students on field trips, and in the past some students have been given the Civil Service Examination for police officers. This type of program seems to be generalizable to a variety of settings and populations.

In-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Summer Work Camp

Funding Source:
- CETA In-school Funds in the past
- At present some funds from the local court system and camp fees.
- Some youth attend camp via CSA funds

General Nature of the Program: The summer camp is a "live in" experience that has been operating in one local area for the past three years. Originally, the camp consisted of a mixture of CETA eligible and paid youth and those who were not targeted for CETA assistance. In fact, some students actually paid to attend the camp. Difficulties arose from this situation and now the camp is a volunteer one and does not utilize CETA funds. Some students pay ($300) to attend camp or are sponsored to participate in the seven week camp experience. The camp experiences have included the following types of activities: winterizing the homes of indigent elderly people; tutoring youth; counseling younger students; and road cleaning/beautification. The camp, which is located on a farm, is a rather demanding experience since many common indoor facilities are not available. Up to 15 students have been involved in the camp which has been supervised by various responsible adults.

Special Notes/Comments: The camp tends to foster the development of individual self-reliance. Laundry, cooking, cleaning and activities such as sing-a-longs and rap sessions have to be accepted and shared by participants if the program is to be a success. Under skilled guidance, a more mature individual who is capable of adjusting well to a work situation should be the result.

The camp idea is one that could be adapted at urban as well as rural locations. An old house in the city might, for example, serve as the "camp site." Obtaining camp counselors (one possibility might be to utilize college juniors and seniors who are eligible for CETA funds) and transportation might be problem areas in establishing an effective program of this type.

In-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Weekend Work Camp

Funding Source: See previous page

General Nature of the Program: This camp is basically similar in form to the summer camp experience, but it occurs throughout the year during weekend periods of time. Students involved in the camp deal with short term projects that are of help and assistance to the community. Students generally participate in the camp from early Friday evening until Sunday noon. As noted previously, the projects that the students work with are a smorgasboard of activities.

Special Notes/Comments: The Weekend Camp may be more difficult to establish and operate than the summer camp. The main reason for this is that it may require extra special effort to locate the weekend, live-in counselors necessary for the program. The community action agency might have to take a large role in coordinating this activity especially if more than one weekend camp location were involved.

On the other hand, the weekend camp, although of shorter duration, does have many of the same positive characteristics as the Summer Work Camp and does deserve careful examination by community action agencies.

In-School Program

Title/Descriptor: New Careers Program

Funding Source: CETA Comprehensive Youth Program Funds

General Nature of the Program: This program provides for up to two years of college (or technical school training) for CETA eligible students who would not ordinarily attend college. The individuals are selected to participate based upon maturity, interest and potential ability to complete the program. (Note: Most of the students are 22 years of age or older). According to the one community action agency that operates this type of program, the students are not necessarily of the highest ability in terms of intellectual skill. Interest and maturity are two of the crucial selection factors. The program generally consists of classes developed especially to meet the needs of participants.

Special Notes/Comments: This type of program requires that good working relationships be developed between the sponsoring community action agency and the training/educational institutions involved in the program. Many of the participants in the program have families and would not be able to attend school without financial assistance from the agency. To that end, fees as well as small stipends are paid to the students.

One minor problem that has occurred with this program is in the area of evaluation. Graduates of the New Careers Program are not counted as positive placements until they have obtained a permanent job. Further schooling, i.e., completion of the baccalaureate degree,

is not presently viewed as a positive outcome by federal funding officials. Although funds for the New Careers Program will shortly run out, the program does warrant renewed examination--particularly since the program has such a strong educational emphasis.

In-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Recreational Semi-educational Programs

Funding Source: State funds and CETA funds combined

General Nature of the Program: The intent of this program is to expand the career awareness of CETA eligible youth during the summer months. In the past, one agency has operated a summer recreational program in which the following types of activities were included:

- Sessions orienting students to photographic techniques
- Cultural trips
- Sessions orienting students to the use of videotaping machines
- Training in various forms of dance

These activities were usually conducted in small groups (6-10 students) and in an informal manner. They were not specifically called or named career education, but there was a strong career orientation and awareness component within the activities.

Special Notes/Comments:

This type of program seems to have tremendous potential for youth still in school. The informal atmosphere of a summer recreational program and the small group size would appear to be most conducive to this type of activity. The factors are especially important for students who may be negatively inclined to learning within a regular school setting.

Staff for this type of activity could come from the ranks of CETA eligible youth who are college juniors or seniors in such fields as education, sociology, and psychology. Difficulties associated with this type of program are as follows:

- If many work sites are used for orientation purposes, it will probably require that the community action agency coordinate such usage.
- Field trips generally require that transportation be provided for participants. (Note: Some alternatives to field trips are available and could be used to reduce costs.)
- For some type of orientation activities (photography, carpentry, etc.) supplies would have to be purchased.

In-school Program

Title/Descriptor: Job Corps

Funding Source: Department of Labor (AFL-CIO input)

General Nature of the Program: This program provides specific vocational training for youths in residential vocational camp settings. This program is not under the jurisdiction of community action agencies, but rather is operated by the AFL-CIO with Department of Labor funds. The agencies provide an intake function for the program. Student selection for the Job Corps is different from many other youth training programs inasmuch as certain minimal competencies such as basic reading and math skills are required. Therefore, some skill testing of applicants for the program is used in the selection process.

The program is most suitable for the young, single person who can leave home. Training is provided in such fields as auto body repair, secretarial services, and refrigeration and heating. The duration of the training is from six months up to two years, depending on the type of field studied. Although there is no locally based placement program for Job Corps graduates most of them do easily locate employment. Students earn money while they are in training.

Special Notes/Comments: At present, the program seems to be underutilized with a small rural representation at the camps; and, at the same time, an overrepresentation of "street wise" city youths who have trouble adjusting to the rural camp environment. Better coordination of the program across the state should result in a more mixed representative group of students.

Out-of-School Programs

Out-of-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Agency-run small businesses

Funding Source: Neighborhood Youth Corps

General Nature of the Program: One community action agency operates several small, not for profit enterprises which provide a limited number of jobs and job training situations for CETA eligible youth and young adults. It should be noted that these enterprises are extensions of the general philosophy of the agency. The agency also operates a credit union, a food cooperative, food buying clubs, and so forth. These endeavors are not to be construed as competitive with private business enterprises in the community, but rather as enabling members of the community to become fully functional in the economics of society. The training provided by these enterprises while quite valuable only reaches a small group (N = 20) of individuals a year. A few training slots are available via the Neighborhood Youth Corps in-school and out-of-school programs.

Special Notes/Comments: These types of programs should be viewed as experimental ones at the present time. Problems relating to fiscal management and the role of the business in the community have to be resolved. The various interactions among agency small businesses and other agencies (the Small Business Administration, for example) also have to be resolved. Nevertheless, these programs do merit further consideration and they do have the potential of providing some job training opportunities for youth.

Out-of-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Experimental Private Enterprise Programs

Funding Source: CSA funds

General Nature of the Program: Several agencies have developed, on a small scale, programs which involve training opportunities in private enterprises. Unemployed adults and youths (ages 18-22) earn while they learn on a private enterprise job site. One agency, by virtue of its proximity to the Ohio Bureau of Employment Services (OBES) has developed formal contracts that a training site signs with regard to the specific training tasks it will be responsible for. The other agency primarily locates training slots in local businesses which might be able to employ a worker after training is terminated. In essence, both programs are purchasing training from the private business by paying the trainee's salary while he/she is being trained.

Special Notes/Comments: These types of programs would seem to have unlimited possibilities if they are carefully specified and if a formal mode of contracting is adopted. The employer gains free employees in exchange for providing on-the-job training. If job slots are available after training and if the community action agency selects individuals with a high probability of benefitting from this situation, then this type of endeavor could be quite successful. More experimentation with these types of programs does seem to be warranted especially in large communities with many business sites.

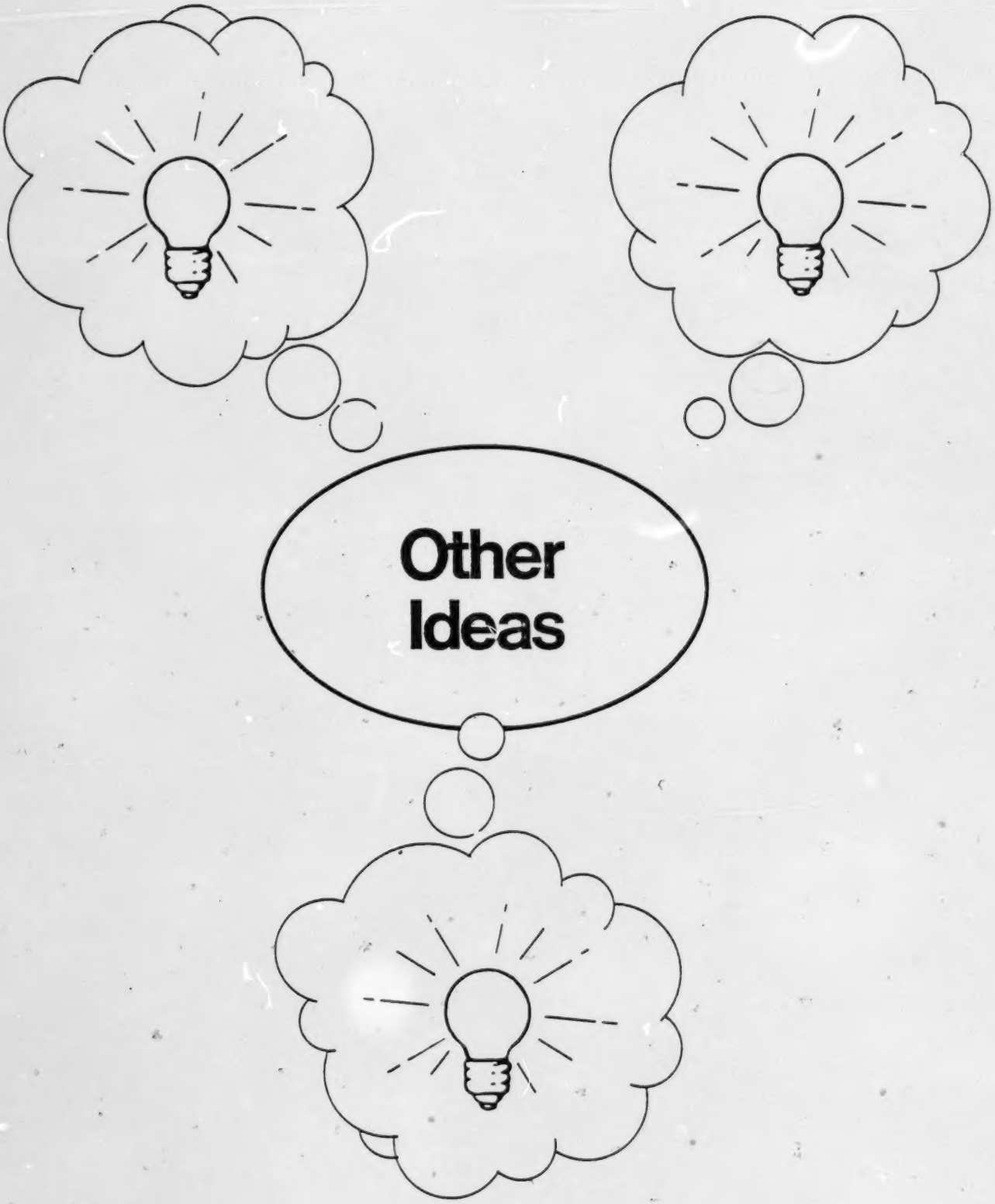
Out-of-School Program

Title/Descriptor: Youth Offender Programs

Funding Source: CETA (?), LEAA

General Nature of the Program: One local community operates a crisis center funded through LEAA. It is a walk-in center for teenagers which provides counseling services in an informal and positive atmosphere. The center deals with drug abuse problems, personal difficulties, etc. There is a close working relationship between the center and the local community action agency. The center and the agency are trying to develop a program in which youthful offenders will have an opportunity to obtain specialized three month training positions. This program will provide the individual with a positive training experience that can be used in letters of reference to prospective employers and time to get on "one's feet" both mentally and physically. CETA funds could be used to assist with the support of this program. Several versions of this type of program and/or this type of thinking were also noted in three other locations involved in the case study of Ohio's Community Action Agencies.

Special Notes/Comments: Probrams for youth offenders seem to be a crucial need area across sites and will require that specialized programs be developed. The community action agencies do not have anywhere near enough financial or human resources to fully resolve this problem; however, programs such as the one described above would help to ease it somewhat.


Other
Ideas

Other Ideas

The ideas and thoughts presented in this section mostly relate to techniques for improving the operation of youth training programs. Some of them come from discussions with agency personnel and some simply represent the ideas of the authors. Each idea is followed by a short paragraph in which its substance is described.

Periodic Group Orientations and Meetings for Supervisors

One agency is experimenting with group orientations and meetings for job supervisors. These sessions give supervisors an opportunity to exchange their perceptions and thoughts about the program and the strategies they are using with enrollers.

Designated Program Coordinators in Schools

One agency has designated program coordinators in each school building with sizeable numbers of CETA eligible youth. These individuals (teachers, counselors, etc.) serve as information sources both from and for the various agency programs. This approach seems to be an excellent way of handling communications.

Initial Group Orientation Sessions for Participants

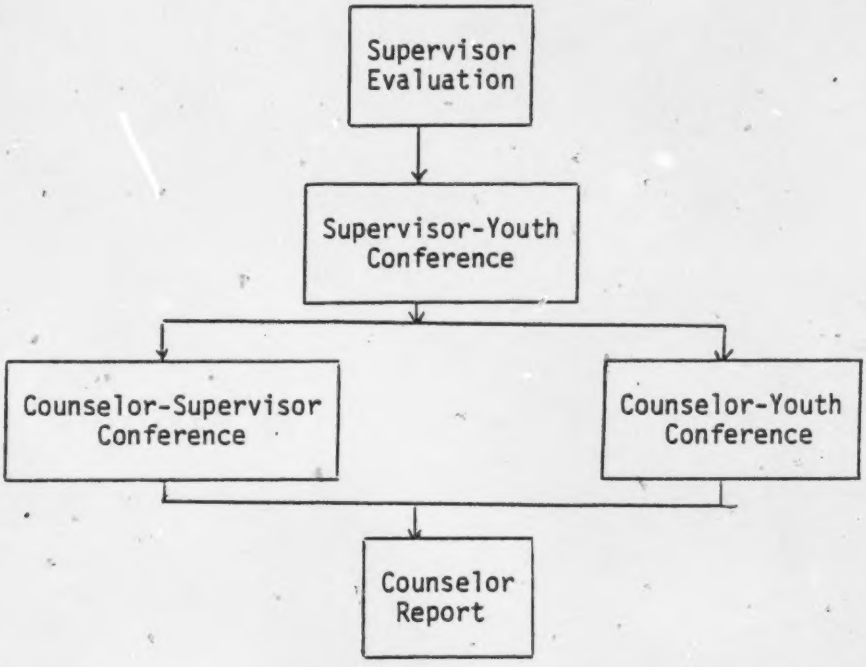
In one city, the community action agency is conducting a group orientation session for program participants prior to their actual participation at a work site. This is a rather intensive orientation and lasts several days. Responsibilities, decorum, dress, etc. are some of the areas covered in the orientation.

Periodic Group Orientation Sessions for Participants

The idea just cited above could easily be expanded to include group orientation sessions on a regular basis. These could include "rap sessions" so that participants could discuss and resolve (with guidance) their own problems. Various materials (e.g., the Ohio Bell System sensitivity training materials) could be adapted for use with participant groups.

An Interesting Evaluation Strategy

One agency has adopted the set of procedures illustrated below:



Utilizing this approach, the counselor will try to resolve any supervisor-youth problems or disagreements that arise. The agency that employs this system has indicated, however, that they have some difficulty in obtaining meaningful scaled ratings from the supervisor.

Programs Targeted for Young Mothers

Special programs could be developed for young mothers which include free day care centers (run by CETA employees). At present, with the cost of day care, there is little incentive for a young indigent mother to seek CETA training and especially to obtain employment after training. Financially, the individual may be better off on welfare than being employed at a minimum wage (or slightly better) level. Incentives should be developed so that work is not only desirable, but also profitable.

Program Tiering or Layering Concepts

Community beautification projects, conservation efforts, etc. should, to the extent possible, be preserved for in-school programs. There, the enthusiasm of youth can be tapped. The programs that offer greater training opportunities should be reserved for older youth. It also should be noted that some individuals may be placed on job sites prior to their being ready for a "sink or swim" situation. The negative effects of this approach on employers may be deleterious to future program efforts and should, if at all possible, be avoided. Other initial alternatives should be sought for these individuals

The $2.30 Pay Floor: Is It Too High for Teenagers?

This above question was recently raised in a Wall Street Journal article. The article points out that many prospective employers who might be willing to hire a teenager will balk at paying the minimum wage. While money is important, the main intent of many community action agency programs is to provide worthwhile experiences and

training. Lower wages in exchange for experience seems to be a reasonable trade-off and one that might be acceptable to a sizeable number of individuals. By this means, it may be possible to involve larger groups of students in work experience situations.

Agency Role--Employer or Developer?

It is being suggested that there is confusion regarding the role of the Community Action Agency. The agency is a fiscal agent and has responsibility for delivering pay checks to program enrollees. This time required for deliverying the checks, in at least one site, does somewhat reduce the amount of time counselors can allot to guidance types of functions. In our judgment, this represents both a partial waste of counselors' time and an example of role confusion. The agency is not basically an employer but more of a human resource developer, would it not be possible to mail the checks or to have employers actually pay the enrollees. Certainly, this would save time and be a more realistic representation of future work situations.

Interesting Evaluation Ideas

One problem noted across community action agencies is that the major program outcome or expectation is that program participants will be placed in permanent job situations. This is rather difficult to achieve in the best of times and especially difficult in times of recession such as we have now. In addition, it is a narrow definition or criterion of success. This narrow concept, it is being suggested, should be broadened to include: changes in attitude over time; changes in work performance over time; skill growth; reduction in the dropout rate (in school program) as compared to similar non-participating groups of students; participant self-reports, etc. Many options could be explored in this area.